

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, BF

SUBJ: LUNCHEON CONVERSATION WITH LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

KENDAL ISAACS, THURSDAY, JULY 24, 1975

1. CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT. I ASKED ISAACS WHAT HIS VIEW WAS ON THE RE-EMERGENCE IN THE NEWS OF THE SIMEON BOWE ISSUE. (DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT BOWE, WHO IS MINISTER OF WORKS, WAS INVOLVED IN AN ALLEGED SCANDAL INVOLVING A LARGE PURCHASE OF PVC PIPES FOR THE GOVERNMENT, THE ALLEGATION BEING THAT HE PURCHASED THE PIPES FROM A SOURCE WHO CHARGED SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN PAID. THE IMPLICATION OF A PAYOFF TO BOWE WAS OBVIOUS.) ISAACS SAID THAT HE WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT MUCH WOULD HAPPEN IN THE SHORT RUN. THE SELECT COMMITTEE HAS JUST SUBMITTED ITS REPORT ON THIS SUBJECT, A REPORT VIGOROUSLY REJECTED BY THE RULING PLP. (IN THIS CONNECTION, IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE SELECT COMMITTEE IS THE ONLY ONE HAVING A MAJORITY OF THE OPPOSITION IN ITS MEMBERSHIP. IT WAS, OF COURSE, ESTABLISHED WITH THE THOUGHT IN MIND THAT IT WOULD REPRESENT A "WATCH DOG" COMMITTEE KEEPING AN EYE ON THE PARTY IN POWER.) THE DIFFICULTY IN THE SIMEON BOWE CASE IS THAT THE COMMITTEE SPLIT PRECISELY ON PARTY LINES WITH THE PLP MEMBERS REFUSING TO ATTEND MEETINGS OR TO CONCUR IN THE FINAL REPORT. ACCORDING TO ISAACS, THE RECENT PRESS SPECULATION WAS THE PRIMIN MIGHT ASK FOR BOWE'S RESIGNATION IS INCORRECT. IN FACT, HE STATED TO ME THAT, BASED ON WHAT HE CONSIDERED TO BE HIGHLY RELIABLE INFORMATION, BOWE "HAS THREATENED TO BLOW THE WHISTLE ON THE PRIMIN IF THE PRIMIN

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DOES NOT SUPPORT HIM." IN SHORT, IT IS ISAACS' VIEW THAT THE

PRIMIN HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN ENOUGH ACTS OF QUESTIONABLE PROPRIETY HIMSELF SO THAT HE CANNOT AFFORD TO COME OUT AGAINST BOWE NO MATTER HOW INCRIMINATING THE EVIDENCE. ACCORDING TO ISAACS, THIS INCIDENT, ASIDE FROM CONTRIBUTING TO A DETERIORATION IN THE PRIMIN'S POSITION AND STATURE IS CAUSING THE YOUNG TURKS WITHIN THE PLP TO BECOME INCREASINGLY DISAFFECTED AND THEY ARE PLACING ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON THE PRIMIN TO CLEAN UP HIS HOUSE. THE IMPRESSION WHICH ISAACS LEAVES IS THAT, FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW, IT IS AN "ALL WIN, CAN'T LOSE" PROPOSITION. THAT IS TO SAY, EITHER THE PRIMIN FIRES BOWE, WHO THEN TURNS OF THE PRIMIN, OR HE KEEPS BOWE AND ACCEPTS THE POLITICAL LIABILITY OF A LABEL OF A CORRUPT GOVERNMENT.

2. ELECTION SOON? I ASKED ISAACS WHETHER HE CREDITED THE RUMORS THAT THE PLP MAY SOON CALL FOR AN ELECTION. (THEY ARE NOT REQUIRED TO DO SO UNTIL MID-1977.) HE SAID HE DID NOT. IN HIS VIEW, THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN THE COUNTRY ARE SO SEVERE THAT THE PRIMIN MUST EITHER FIND A WAY TO CORRECT THEM, OR AT LEAST GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE HAS FOUND A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS, BEFORE HE DARED STAND FOR REELECTION. NOT SURPRISINGLY, ISAACS IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE PRIMIN CAN FIND A SOLUTION, OR EVEN AN APPARENT SOLUTION, BEFORE THE NEXT ELECTION, NOT TO MENTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

3. ISAACS' REFLECTIONS ON A POLITICIAN'S LIFE. ISAACS IS, OF COURSE, A PRACTICING ATTORNEY. HE COMMENTED THAT HIS PRACTICE TENDED TO SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE DEMANDS ON HIS TIME MADE BY POLITICS. CONVERSELY, HE NOTED THAT WHEN HE WAS IN COURT "PERFORCE POLITICS SUFFER." DID THIS MEAN THAT ISAACS WAS DISPLEASED WITH POLITICS? NO, NOT DISPLEASED AND, IN FACT, HE CONCEDED THAT HE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY FIND IT INTERESTING TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER IF HIS PARTY WERE ABLE TO WIN THE ELECTION. AT THE SAME TIME, HE CONFESSED THAT HE REALLY DID NOT ENJOY POLITICS AND NEVER HAD ANY INTENTION OF DEVOTING HIMSELF TO THIS ENDEAVOR. RATHER, HE HAD FELT THAT HE HAD AN OBLIGATION TO GIVE SOME OF HIS TIME TO PUBLIC SERVICE AND, SOMEWHAT TO HIS SURPRISE, FOUND HIMSELF CATAPULTED INTO THE LEADERSHIP POSITION WHEN OTHER LEADERS IN THE PARTY WERE

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